Waterloo

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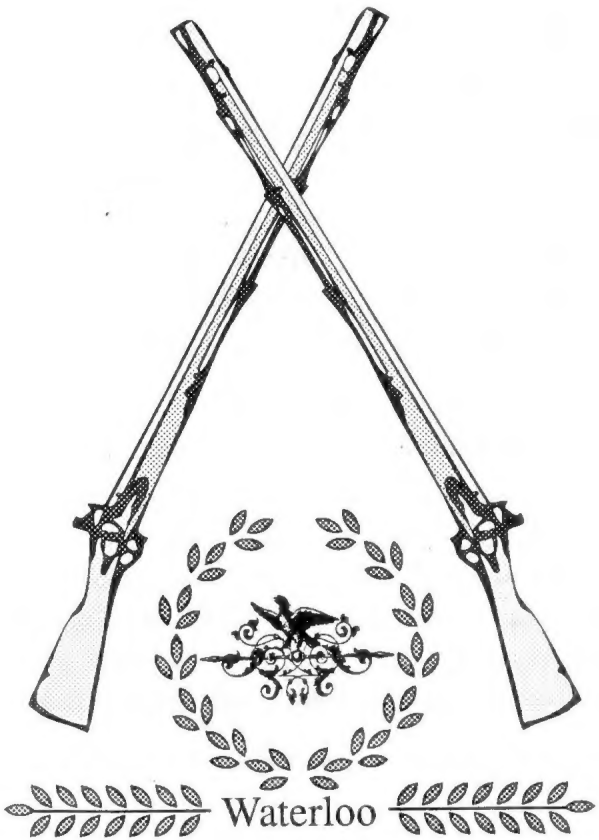

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Introduction

Welcome to Waterloo, a new concept in computer wargaming. Unlike other wargames you may have played, Waterloo dispenses with the rather unreal 'overview' normally given to wargames commanders who are allowed to simultaneously examine troop dispositions, movements, combat results, etc. and usually, to order and move every aspect of an army with seemingly godlike powers. So often, many wargames ignore the difficult realities of, for instance, pre-radio communications, and elaborate chain of command through generals and colonels of varying degrees of intelligence and skill, involving varying degrees of success when the commander-in-chief's orders are executed, or even the time delay between the occurrence of events in the field and the relevant information being relayed back to your headquarters.

The Fog of War

In Waterloo, you are the Duke of Wellington, or the Emperor Napoleon, and the price of such responsibility is high, since you, like them must suffer the trials of a commander-in-chief of the Napoleonic era. Your view of the battle will be limited by the point at which you stand. To see more you will have to move around. Your battle orders, though written by you, will be executed by your subordinate corps commanders who will, in turn, order their divisional general to move their infantry, cavalry, and artillery units. At the lowest level, regimental colonels will make decisions over which you will have little control.

At each level of command, it is possible that the various commanders may ignore your orders, either as a result of better local knowledge, a surplus/surfeit of courage or skill. Finally, all your own orders are relayed by rider, involving a time delay between the issue of those orders and their execution.

Waterloo is not so much a simulation of an existing wargame, as a simulation of war itself.

French Foot Artillery
Imperial Guard

Player's Guide

1. Loading The Game

Refer to your disk label for loading instructions.

2. Setting Up The Game

Next, you will be asked a number of questions. If this is your first game, the following should act as a guide.

(i) Human to play Napoleon, Wellington, or both commanders?

You may select either side. However, time is in Wellington's favour. He can afford to sit tight at the very beginning of the battle, and the defensiveness of his initial stance should allow you a little breathing space while you try to guess the French intentions.

Whether playing solo against the computer, or against another person, a useful way of learning the game is to give the computer control of both sides so that you can watch how the game progresses.

(ii) Messages between generals to be displayed?

Although this would not be realistic it will be helpful to see how orders are interpreted by the computer. Answer Y.

(iii) Player to be allowed to view battlefield from different places other than commander's position?

For the purposes of familiarising yourself with the battlefield, its locations and how they are represented by the computer graphics, this is a must. Realistically, of course, this would not be possible. For the time being; answer Y.

(iv) Cannons Firing?

Answer Y to be able to see the puffs of smoke from cannons as they fire.

(v) Note on what the program is doing to appear at bottom of the screen?

Answer Y.

(vi) Change historical orders?

At the start of the game both sides have been issued with the same orders as the actual battle. Until you have familiarised yourself with the game, it is best not to change these, or you could end up in a mess. As a starting point the historical orders are sufficient for most purposes. Answer N (see section 6. when you wish to change them).

(vii) Save off game every hour?

This is a precaution against the computer being accidentally switched off and refers to a simulated hour of game play. Answer N.

3. Starting The Game

With the Game set up, you may now turn your attention to the battlefield.

Game Time starts at 11.30 in the morning and will end at 9.30 that night. Depending on which commander-in-chief you have chosen to play, your view will either be from Wellington's start position looking south, or Napoleon's looking north. An approximate map has been supplied indicating the initial dispositions of both armies lined from east to west along opposing ridges.

French Chasseur à Cheval

If you have selected to play Napoleon, you will be asked if you are ready to issue your Orders. If you have chosen Wellington, you will have to wait while the French move first. Before issuing any Orders, take this opportunity to examine the view, to look around the screen, and familiarise yourself with the battlefield.

4. Observations

Your initial view is from your commander's position (Napoleon or Wellington). Your commander is always located at the bottom of the screen, no matter which direction he is looking in. You can see as far as one and a half, to two miles in any directions, bearing in mind that the entire battlefield is five miles from east to west, and four miles from north to south.

4.1 Looking Around

You may look in any one of four compass directions (North, South, East or West) following the 'Order' prompt at the bottom of the screen. To do this, simply type Look and give the compass direction you require. Compass directions can be abbreviated to their initial letters.

For Example: Look East or Look E.

You will be given a perspective view of what the commander can see from his present location.

4.2 The Mouse

The Mouse acts as a pointing finger from this perspective view. Clicking on the mouse over villages, terrain features, army units etc, will return names of various locations, the names of generals, unit types and also the range and direction. For a close up view (if the view is obscured), just click the mouse on any obscured part and the whole scene will appear.

4.3 Looking From Other Positions

If, when answering the questions concerned with 'Setting Up The Game', you answered Y to option (3), allowing you to Look from other positions, you will also be able to see what is happening from other battlefield locations.

To do this, type Look, the compass direction you want to look in, then From, and the name or point of location you want to look from. For Example: typing 'Look S From Hougoumount', will show the view south from the chateau of Hougoumount.

You could also Type: 'Look E From Reille'. This would show you that corps commander's view east, though bear in mind that when viewing from another general's position, you may only choose one from your own side.

4.4 Moving The Headquarters

One final way of altering what you can see on the battlefield is to move your HQ. During your army's movement phase you will be asked if you wish to move your HQ. If so, you will be asked the main compass direction you wish to move it to and, having selected N,S,E or W you may use the mouse to pick out the required direction.

The change of location will not take place immediately. Your HQ will, like other troops, move as far towards your named destination as time allows. You will then be able to view from your new position(s).

Please note that you will not be able to move if you are caught up in a disordered retreat, or are mortally wounded. For more on movement see section 5.

4.5 Recognising Units

Units can be identified by their different uniforms. Point at a unit and click the mouse to pick up details of what you can see. Each regiment is represented as a block of units led by a colonel. Colonels can be identified by their triangular flags. During the course of the game, units will change formation and direction. The infantry, for instance will form into squares if threatened by cavalry, or guns will be seen to be towed, or will be lined up to fire.

There will also be individual horsemen, either generals or riders (messengers). Generals will be carrying a flag; riders will not. Senior Generals are colour coded and a square flag indicates a division, corps, or commander-in-chief's position.

5. Orders

You can type in your Orders in lower or upper case. Also, spelling mistakes, incorrect sentences and semantic errors are picked up. In the event of an error, the order is left on the screen with the cursor at the word that the programme thinks is out of place. The order can then be edited using the cursor, backspace, or delete keys.

A pattern matching routine will also allow words to be shortened to their shortest identifiable sequence. For example: the farm 'La-Belle-Alliance' can be entered as La-Belle, since no other words start with these letters.

There are 7 main Order types available to you. These can be typed in following the 'Order' prompt when it appears on the screen.

They are:

Basic Orders
Battle Orders
Support Orders
Report Orders
Transfer Orders
Strategy Orders
Defence/Attack Line Orders

In game terms, the Orders that you issue will follow a strict chain of command, starting with you, the Commander-in-Chief, and following down through the military hierarchy; first to the respective Corps Commanders, then to their Divisional Generals, then to Regimental Colonels.

The Commander-in-Chief (you) can only order their Divisional generals under them, and so on. You will see how this works later in this section.

Both players are able to enter a maximum of 8 Orders before the programme moves on to the next Turn and implements those Orders.

Each turn represents 15 minutes of simulated game time.

Whenever 'key' appears in red at the bottom right hand corner of the screen, either click the mouse, press any key, or wait for time-out (about 20 seconds), to go back to the 'Orders:' prompt.

The Orders that can be sent to your Corps Commanders are quite varied and sophisticated. However, there are also a number of Basic Orders designed to help players. These are detailed in the following section.

5.1 Basic Orders

Look - The Look order requires a compass direction, and can be combined with From which is the location you wish to Look (compass direction) From (place or name) - See section 4: 'Observation' for more details.

Name - This Order will detail the command structure of Corps Commanders of Divisional Generals, depending on which name is typed in. The names of all subordinates and the troop type they control (i.e. Infantry, Cavalry, etc) will be shown or, simply type; Corps.

Points - A running total of how well you are doing. Points are given according to the current size of your army, the prisoners and casualties you have caused, and the farms and villages that you control.

X or Esc - Stops the computer from waiting for more Orders, allowing the program to move on to the next Turn, with less than 8 Orders submitted, which it can then execute in the next 15 minute period of battle.

Pause - Freezes the game until you are ready to continue.

Save - Saves the current situation at the end of the next period of battle, but continues with the game. Players willing to Save the game after every round could, if they wished, play 'Waterloo' by mail; one player making his moves, and then posting the disk to his opponent, who likewise issues his Orders, saves the data, and posts the disk back.

Quit - Abandons game.

5.2 Battle Orders

All Orders are merely sentences containing instructions for your Corps Commanders. These are typed into the computer and acted upon by your units in the following turn. The sentence that you type in must contain certain instructions for it to be understood.

Battle Orders and every other type of Order described in the following sections, consist of 2 components, these are:

Action
Conditions

For your Battle Orders, you have a choice of 6 Battle Actions, these are:

Move
Attack
Defend
Shell
Stay In Reserve
Retreat

('Shell' means the firing of artillery batteries, the rest should be self-explanatory).

These 'Actions' are the commands that concern the movement and combat of your units.

Once you have chosen a desired Action for your Battle Order, you must then determine the 'Order Conditions' that will affect how, and by whom it will be carried out.

For this, you will use some or all of the following available Order Conditions, these are:

Who
Place
Time
Duration
All Corps

Order Conditions determine your troop's targets and objectives.

Let us assume that you wished an entire Corps to move to a specific location.

First, state to whom your Orders are addressed (this must always be the name of a Corps Commander), then the time at which you wish them to Move, the Battle Action they must perform (in this case they must Move), the place they must move to. So, for example, you could type in:

(Who)	*(Time)*	*(Battle Action)*	*(Place)*
'Reille	*at 12 30 pm*	*Move*	*to Pospol'*

When stating who is to follow an order, remember that you may issue direct Orders to Corps Commanders only. If you want a specific unit to follow an order, you must first type in a Corps Commanders name telling him to Order the unit for you.

The place need not be a named village or farm - it could be a General, or a description of some terrain feature or enemy force, or simply a distance and direction relative to one of these names. To give a relative position, type in a distance, then a direction, one of eight compass directions, then the place: for example, ' $1^1/_2$ *Miles east of Plancenoit'. The time of an action is optional, it is merely when you may want the Order to take effect. Also, there is the duration, also optional. Its form is:*

'for (x) hours (y) minutes,' or:
'for (x) hours,' or:
'for (y) minutes'.

A particularly powerful and useful Order Condition is 'all corps', especially when combined with some of the Order types you will come to later, for example the Battle Report Order, as in:

'All Corps send me your Battle Report'.

There are a vast number of possibilities, and all the Order Conditions could apply to the 6 Battle Actions. But you may wish to be more specific. You may, for instance, only wish for a Corps Commander to use a specific type or number of his troops.

In that case, you must instruct him to 'Order' the Divisions or troop types of his Corps with which you are concerned. Let us assume you wished one of your Corps Commanders to hold a hill with only two infantry divisions. Your instruction might be:

'D-Erlon at 1 15 pm Order 2 infantry divisions to Defend the hills 1 mile south of you.'

Remember that is was necessary to use the word "Order" in the sentence because specific divisions were concerned. It would be the same if you wanted to move the Division under the command of General Donzelot. Because Donzelot is subordinate to Corps Commander D'Erlon, it would be necessary to state:

'D-Erlon at 1 15 pm Order Donzelot to Defend the hills 1 mile south of you.'
'D-Erlon Move Donzelot 1 mile south,' would be illegal.

If, in your Orders to a Corps Commander, you do not specify any forces, he will select one or more of his own choice. He will, at the same time, be acting on his own initiative, issuing his own Orders within the bounds of the strategy he is working in, and any attack/defence line that may have been specified.

Here are some examples of a range of Battle Orders, using a number of Battle Actions and Order Conditions:

D-Erlon order your artillery to move $^1/_2$ mile north
Reille move to Mon-Plaisir
Lobau Shell Mont-St-Jean Farm for 3 hours
Drouot shell the enemy cavalry 1 mile north of you
D-Erlon order your infantry to move to the HQ
Reille at 2 30 pm Retreat

5.3 Support Orders

When a Corps Commander supports another, he transfers his own divisions to the Corps he is supporting when requests for assistance are received.

Support Orders tell a Corps to give, take, stop giving, or stop taking support from another Corps Commander.

There are 4 Support Actions:

Give Support To
Take Support From
Stop Giving Support
Stop Taking Support From

If a Support Action is taken, the corresponding Action is sent back automatically. So that if the Order:

'Lobau Give Support To Reille', is entered, then the commander's staff send the Order:

'Reille Take Support From Lobau.'

The Conditions listed in 5.2 (Battle Orders) also apply to Support Orders. As with Battle Orders, you must state which Corps Commander should peform the Action and you have the option of stating the time when it should begin.

Added to the list of available Conditions previously given in section 5.2 is: (Assign Corps) which is the Corps a Commander will give support to. You may give support to more than one corps.

Here are some examples of Support Orders:

Lobau give Support to Reille.
Lobau stop giving support
Drouot at 6 30 pm give support to Reille, D-Erlon and Milhaud

5.4 Report Orders

A Report Order requests the Corps Commander to ask all subordinates for details of men, guns, casualties, prisoners etc. and to pass that information back to you, the Commander-in-Chief.

The Report Action is:

Send Me Your Battle Report

Examples:

D-Erlon send me your battle report.
All Corps at 8 30 pm send me your battle report.

5.5 Transfer Order

This tells a Corps Commander to Transfer one or more of his divisions to another Corps Commander

There is only one Action to the Transfer Order and that is, of course:

Transfer

To the previous Conditions is added:

Division

To Transfer a division to another Corps Commander, you may type in the name of its General, or its type, and a specified or unspecified number of divisions. If you are not using the name of the division's general, you must indicate its type, eg: infantry etc.

Here are some examples of Transfer Orders:

Lobau Transfer Domon to Reille
Lobau Transfer your cavalry to Reille
Lobau at 6 pm Transfer 2 divisions of infantry to D-Erlon.

5.6 Strategy Orders

Corps Commanders will operate on one single strategy. This Order will probably only be issued at the beginning. There may also be a need to use it if things go very well, or very badly.

The Strategy Actions are:

Change Your Strategy To Attack
Change Your Strategy To Defend
Change Your Strategy To Stand-by
Change Your Strategy To Reserve
Change Your Strategy To Retreat

Also, if you wish to minimise the level of control a Corps Commander has over his divisions, in order to take direct control of them, change the Corps Commander's Strategy to STAND.

Some Examples:

D-Erlon at 1 pm Change Your Strategy To Attack
Reille At 7 pm Change Your Strategy To Defend

5.7 Attack & Defence Line Orders

This is a strategic Order to those Corps Commanders who are to make up the front line. It is important that the front line is complete, as it is in the historical Orders both armies start with by default.

A Corps Commander on the front line is given two places to form a line between, and two Corps Commander's names to link with at these places. Alternatively, a flank can be specified that does not require a place or general to be named.

This Order need not be issued if you wish to use the historic Orders - the Corps Commander will adjust the line specified to ensure a firm link with the named Commanders. If a defence line is specified, the Commander will make the best use of the surrounding terrain and buildings, and an attack line will be pushed forward.

Your Choice of Strategies is:

Form An Attack Line From
Form A Defence Line From

Additional Conditions are:

linking with
the west flank
the east flank

Examples:

Reille form a defence line from the west flank to La-Belle-Alliance linking with D-Erlon.

D'Erlon form an attack line from La-Belle-Alliance linking with Reille to Frichermont linking with Lobau.

Lobau Form a defence line from $^{1}/_{2}$ mile south of Frichermont linking with D-Erlon to the east flank.

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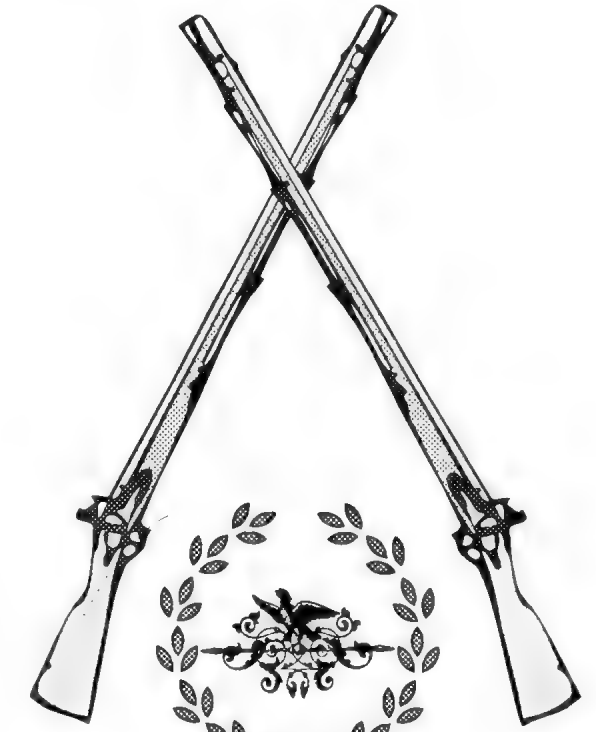


Basic Orders

LOOK	Look (direction) From (place/name)
NAME	Command structure of named Commander or type: CORPS
X-ESC	Advance game with less than 8 Orders entered
PAUSE	-
SAVE	-
QUIT	-

Battle Orders

Battle Actions	Move
	Attack
	Defend
	Shell
	Retreat
	Stay In Reserve
Support Actions	Give Support To
	Take Support From
	Stop Taking Support From
	Stop Giving Support To
Report Actions	Send Me Your Battle Report
Transfer Actions	Transfer
Strategy Actions	Change Your Strategy to: Attack/Defend/Standby

Order Conditions

Who	Name of Corps Commander being addressed
Time	When order takes effect (optional)
Place	Village/farm/terrain feature/ enemy force/ distance/direction/hours/minutes - (optional)
Assign Corps	The 1 or more corps to receive support
All Corps	All corps to perform Order
Division	Name or type of division
Linking With East/West Flank	Joining of front line units in attack/defence line

General

6. Historical Orders

Obviously, the Orders you send are the key to the game. However, assuming that in the Set-up phase you answered N to the question 'Change historical orders?'; then the Corps Commanders and their Generals will have already received the Orders they were historically given. Fighting will start even if no new Orders are sent.

If you choose to change the initial Orders, you may enter up to 30 new ones for either side. The Corps Commanders will keep their historical Orders unless you change them, so there is no need to re-enter Orders a Commander already has. Your new Orders, if any, will take immediate effect.

6.1 Historical Events

Note that this simulation represents events as they were is history. For that reason, the French will be unable to recall Grouchy's Corps, which was, on the day, fighting some distance away, in Wavre. This also means that the Prussians will arrive in the afternoon/early evening.

French Charleville Musket

7. Aspects Of Gameplay

The game works along basic Napoleonic principles. The various movement and combat results are calculated according to extremely detailed rules, similar to those found in the more complex of Tabletop Wargames. The following are an indication of the more important aspects of play represented within the simulation.

7.1 Troop Quality

Logically enough, the best units on either side are in the guard units. Line and Light units are regarded as professional soldiers with appropriate training, whereas Landwher or Militia are hastily assembled forces, and not full time soldiers.

7.2 Artillery Ranges

Artillery Range is approximately $^1/_2$ mile.
A battery of guns can only fire at a target it can see.

The artillery officers in the field select the most effective ammo types according to the range and target.

7.3 Morale

Units may be forced into disorganised retreats or temporary routs, and a retreating unit can spark off several units into a major retreat. Militia and Landwher units have a fairly brittle morale, while others can sustain more punishment before breaking. Some routed units will eventually reform, though their morale is likely to be shaky still.

7.4 Messenger Riders

The horsemen carrying messages are treated as units themselves. They can, therefore, get shot, or caught up in routs and lost.

7.5 Officer's Initiative

All commanders interpret their orders. There are three levels of 'Intelligence' below the Commander-in-Chief; at Corps, Divisional and Regimental level. A Commander will attempt to use the terrain features to his advantage and he may not obey an Order if he considers it suicidal, out of date, or irrelevant to the local situation. Corps Commanders have a high degree of flexibility and can advance, retreat, support each other, and make similar decisions without consulting with the Commander-in-Chief.

The regimental commanders will order infantry into the optimum formation for their relevant situation, i.e. forming square when faced by enemy cavalry, line to maximise firepower, column for heavier impact when attacking.

7.6 Excluded Game Aspects

A few aspects of Napoleonic Warfare have been excluded, these are: Smoke blocking the line of sight, the breaking down of Regiments into long lines of skirmishers and promoting or demoting of staff.

8. End Of The Game

The battle ends at 9.30pm. Full battle reports will become available and the result assessed. You are also given the option of looking around the battlefield.

9. Hints On Play

Time

One very important aspect when issuing Orders is to be aware of the time delay that ensues while riders carry your messages to the relevant commanders, and those commanders attempt to carry them out. If you see a crisis develop on the battlefield think twice before acting upon it. Be sure that what you are attempting can be achieved in time to be of some use. Perhaps the General in command will be able to sort it out anyway? Don't waste good troops sending them off on hopeless mercy dashes that will weaken your army's cohesion.

Issuing Orders

Make your Orders clear; 'Lancey Move to La-Haie' is vague. How many divisions do you want to move to La-Haie? Unless you want Lancey to make the decision you'd best be more specific:

'Lancey Order 2 Infantry Divisions and your cavalry to move to La-Haie.'

Don't use the 'Strategy' or 'Form Attack/Defence Line' Orders until you are sure of what you're doing. These Orders have a major effect on how the game is fought.

Setup Options

Be sure to use option (v) in section 2. - 'Setting Up The Game,' which allows you to see a note on what the programme is doing, especially when you are learning.

Artillery

Be sure to fully exploit the 'Shell' order. Units behind hard cover may be difficult to dislodge without an initial artillery barrage. Don't waste potential gunpower on targets on the edge of their $^1/_2$ mile range. Make sure your firepower is as effective as possible. You may consider massing the fire of many batteries against 1 target. Try to ensure that you support infantry or cavalry attacks with artillery.

Reconnaissance

Keep 'Looking' at every opportunity, never forget that the battle is going on all around you, and in places you can't see. Make sure you ask for reports every hour or so.

'All Corps send me your Battle Report.' is well worth giving a sensible schedule time say, at halfway through the day.

Planning Ahead

Don't try to do too much at once. It's very easy to get in a muddle. Set yourself an objective and an overall strategy, and try not to let unexpected events distract you from your purpose.

Included in the following pages is some background to the nature of Napoleonic warfare, the composition of its armies and the tactics they actually employed in battle. Obviously it will help if you know something about how a Napoleonic army was led and how it fought. The section entitled 'The Hundred Days' traces the events that led up to Waterloo and includes an account of the battle itself, all of which should be of some help.

Napoleon Attending to the Wounded

Background

Napoleonic Warfare

"Make war offensively; it is the sole means to become a great captain and to fathom the secrets of the art."
- from Napoleon's Correspondance.

The method and nature of Napoleonic warfare was, in its essential form, much the same as previous centuries; the General's manoeuvre of large, drilled bodies of infantrymen, supported by artillery and cavalry, wielded in concert in an attempt to achieve some predetermined objective. Napoleon's approach to warfare, the one that so dazed and confused his opponents for so much of the time, was wholly geared towards bold offensive actions aimed at seizing the initiative.

On a strategic level, Napoleon made great use of speed and mobility. Unlike many of his opponents still operating on the rather leisurely principles of 18th century warfare, Napoleon's armies were no longer dependent on slow moving supply trains but instead, would live off the land they passed through by foraging. One of Napoleon's innovations was the 'Corps d'Armee' system, where each corps that made up the whole of his force was a miniature self-supporting army in itself, containing infantry, cavalry, artillery plus all engineer and support units. The policy of living off the land, combined with his self-sufficient army corps, usually deployed within at least a day's march of each other for rapid support, allowed the formations able to concentrate with deceptive speed on the allotted battlefield of Napoleon's choice.

For Napoleon, every strategic campaign manoeuvre was made with the final battle in mind. He fused manoeuvre and battle into one, and his phenomenal sense of timing, combined with his attention for detailed planning and a thorough knowledge of the terrain he moved upon, made for devastating consequences when he eventually joined battle with his intended victim in the field.

"It is often in the system of campaign that one conceives the system of battle," *Napoleon once said.*

For him the concept of all out attack, aimed at ending a war in one blow was his strategic as well as his tactical ideal. Even when he was strategically on the defensive, as in his campaign of 1814, when the allies invaded France, we find his solutions to be offensively based. The French victory of Austerlitz, where it appeared that the French were waiting for an allied attack, was only an attacking tactic of infinite subtlety, for after creating an illusion of weakness and indecision, Napoleon lured his opponents into making their mistakes.

However, though Napoleon preferred to attack, it was those of his enemies that stayed most determinedly on the defensive that suffered the least against him as, for example at Eylau, Borodino, and Waterloo itself. Napoleon was most successful when he goaded his opponents into ill-conceived, or ill-timed counter attacks.

Of great importance to Napoleon, was achieving an envelopment of his enemy. He preferred, if possible, to do this on a strategic level, with an independent force arriving on his enemy's flank after say, a forced march from elsewhere. This force, if sufficiently large would preferably arrive to cross his opponent's line of retreat. The psychological, or morale effect of this was often decisive in itself. However, if there were insufficient troops available, Napoleon would resort to an 'outflanking' manoeuvre on the battlefield with a force that was part of his army's battleline. If successful, this would have the effect of forcing the enemy to change front, or to redeploy their line, with a subsequent disruption that could be exploited. But always, success depended on timing. For Napoleon, this sense of timing was applied to all aspects of an engagement: the sequence of initial concentration, the appearance of the outflanking force, the massed shelling of the crucial enemy sector, and the ordering of the final devastating attack.

Leaving aside the grand strategic concepts over which Napoleon was master, let us look at the battlefield tactics he employed. There were three basic types of Napoleonic battle: the frontal attack, the double battle, and the enveloping battle. The frontal battle was much like most 18th century conflicts. Two armies faced each other in a rigid formation, bludgeoning each other with fire and shock until one side was defeated. This was a tactic that Napoleon only used as a last resort. Not much more than a battle of attrition, it was wasteful of lives and usually failed to arrive at a conclusive result, since the defeated army was still able to retreat along its line of communication.

Then there was the double battle. This often occurred when the form of the battlefield was divided in two by some geographical feature, like a river. Alternatively, a double battle might ensue for some strategic reason or simply because the size of the armies made it necessary, as in Borodino where the fighting round the village of Borodino, and along the north bank of the River Kalatsha was declared a secondary action, to be fought by Eugene's IVth Corps. Later in the battle, half of the IVth Corps were brought to the south bank to participate in the main battle focused upon the 'Great Redoubt'.

Napoleon's undisputed favourite was the enveloping attack, or 'strategic battle', designed to break his opponent's nerve, and to lure him to weaken his battle line at a predetermined point. The aim was to pin the enemy frontally, while an enveloping force stole, preferably unknown to the opponent, onto a flank. This manoeuvre achieved, a signal would be given for the enveloping force to advance. As the enemy turned to face this new threat a hinge would be created in his lines. This was the moment to unleash the 'masse de decision', with a massed artillery barrage against this weak hinge, and hordes of conserved fresh troops with which to deliver the fatal blow and punch a hole through which cavalry could pour, causing confusion, disorder and panic. The climax would be the pursuit of the light cavalry, harrying the reeling foe, and assuring the complete defeat of the enemy.

There were counters to these tactics, of course, and Wellington at least was able to discover them. For example, a decisive move against the initial 'pinning' force made with all possible strength would be sufficient to stop the envelopment tactics in its tracks. And of course, at Waterloo, the arrival of the Prussians on Napoleon's flank had exactly the effect of an enveloping attack.

Wellington, in many ways, was the perfect foil to Napoleon for the 'Iron Duke' was a master of defensive warfare, and the dramatic shock attacks of the French were perfectly countered by the steadfast cool of his English soldiery. His tactics were of a defensive-offensive nature, in which he encouraged the enemy to attack. Wellington would then use the confusion of the charge, or the rapid advance as the cover under which he could counter attack. He was a master at utilising terrain, and commonly made use of reverse slopes to shield his troops from artillery. Though it may seem obvious, he was the only commander of this period to do so.

The truth is that much of the time, Napoleon's opponents were only moderately skilled, and hopelessly dogged by a legacy of outdated military theories and attitudes, few came near to understanding the depth of his strategic and tactical grasp, and the precision of the military machine that he had built. There were counters to the Napoleonic methods of war, but they had to be exercised with as much skill and cunning to succeed.

Organisation

The Basic organisation of the armies of the Napoleonic period was roughly the same for all nations, with the army consisting of three main elements; Infantry; Cavalry, and Artillery.

Infantry

English Infantryman

The backbone of armies of this period was the Infantryman and his principle weapon, the musket. The basic tactical unit of the infantry was the battalion. The infantry battalions were grouped together to form Regiments. A Regiment could contain anywhere between 2 and 10 battalions, but 3-4 were most common. The Regiments were formed into brigades and eventually a division, consisting of 4 or more Regiments.

The main distinction in infantry types was between Line and Light. Light Infantry were generally better marksmen and more agile, their role geared towards more mobile operations such as skirmishing. In many ways, the Light Infantry was very similar to the infantry of the line, though, its more specialised training did tend to give it a better 'esprit de corps'. The Light Infantry of the various nations were known by different names; the French Voltigeurs, the Russian, Austrian and Prussian Jâegers and the British Rifles for example.

The Elite of the infantry were the guard units, chosen for their veteran status, better ability, or some other distinguishing quality. Guard units were, in general, better equipped, and better fed than Line Infantry. The most famous of all guard units was Napoleon's Old Guard, the cream of the imperial army, recruited from men of the line regiments with ten years' service.

When line infantry was in short supply, commanders often had to make use of militia units, largely untried formations of conscripts, or reservists like the Prussian 'Landwher' which, while being built around cadred of experienced officers, their ranks consisted of many boys aged under 17, or older men above 45. The lack of training, and inexperience of such units tended to make them something of an unknown quantity.

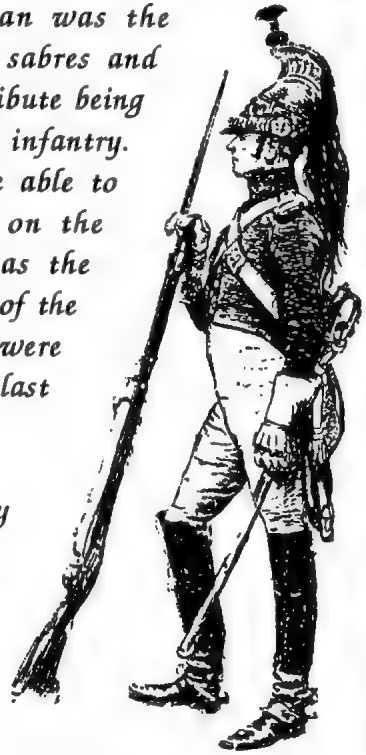
Cavalry

There were four main types of cavalry, Lancers, Hussars, Dragoons and Heavy cavalry, variously known as Cuirassiers, Horse Guards etc, although some armies made little distinction between these types.

The main distinction was between Light and Heavy Cavalry.

English Private - Life Guards

The most common type of cavalryman was the Dragoon. Dragoons were armed with sabres and carbines, or musketoons, their main attribute being their versatility as a kind of mounted infantry. Depending on circumstances, they were able to perform as Light or Heavy cavalry on the battlefield and, on campaign, acted as the reconnaissance troops acting in advance of the main army. On occassions, Dragoons were used dismounted, but this was only a last resort.



Dragoon of the French Imperial Guard

Usually the largest group of the cavalry arm were the Light Cavalry, the most common being the Hussars; dashing young men in flamboyant uniforms, expected to maintain the highest standards of courage and bravado. Other Light Cavalry were Lancers, or Uhlans who, armed with their striking power of a lance, were able to combine the shock effect of Heavy Cavalry with the mobility of the Hussars. Due to the specialised training required to handle the lance they were never as numerous a component of the Light Cavalry as the Hussars. The chief role of Light Cavalry was as pursuit troops, or for reconnaissance. The Light Cavalry were there to exploit successes, to prevent fleeing troops from reforming, or to cover a retreat.

English Hussar

The Heavy Cavalry were an army's shock troops. The main type of Heavy Cavalrymen were the Cuirassiers; big men on big horses, wearing steel helmets and breastplates, and armed with long straight swords and a pair of pistols. The slower Heavy Cavalry were usually kept in reserve, their primary role was in battle, where their size and weight allowed them to ride down their adversaries, and punch holes in enemy lines for other troops to exploit.

The basic unit of cavalry was the squadron, consisting of around 100 men. The squadrons were grouped into Regiments or Brigades of 2-4 or more squadrons each. These Regiments were either acted as auxiliaries to an army corps or, as is the usual case with Heavy Cavalry, massed into Divisions.

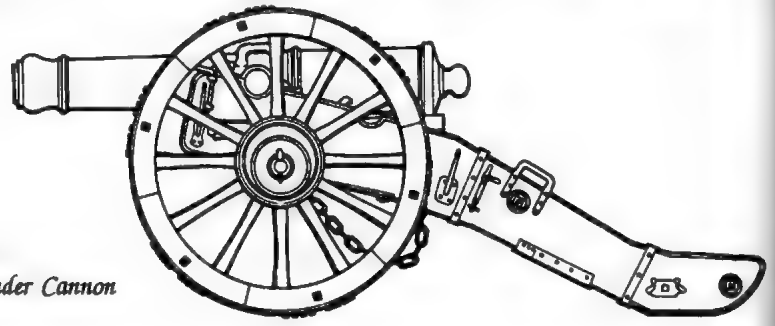
Artillery

Although not used at the time, the term Field Artillery is the best way of distinguishing guns generally used on campaign, from those used for garrison duties or sieges.

Usually grouped into batteries of four or more guns, there were three types of artillery; Foot, Horse and Reserve. The guns were distinguished according to the weight of the shot they could fire (i.e. 4 pounder, 8 pounder, etc.) or by their calibre. The commonest type was the Foot Artillery Battery which consisted of six or more guns. These were the medium 6, 7, 8 or 9 pounder cannon frequently augmented by at least two howitzers capable of firing shells.

Horse Artillery was made up of smaller 3, 4 or 6 pounders whose crews were mounted or rode on the limbers. This enabled the batteries to keep pace with rapid cavalry advances, or to supply fast infantry support where needed. Although their range shorter, their increased mobility allowed them to ride up within close range of their targets with a margin of safety.

Reserve Artillery consisted of the bigger 12 pounder cannon and 8 inch Howitzers. These were usually grouped into massed batteries and used to pour a concentrated fire on specific areas prior to an assault. Reserve artillery was generally placed with the army reserve corps.



French
12 Pounder Cannon

Tactics

'The fate of a battle is a question of a single moment, a single thought...the decisive moment arrives, the moral spark is kindled, and the smallest reserve force settles the matter.'
- Napoleon Bonaparte -

Although, in Waterloo, your subordinate commanders will be making the decisions regarding the tactical formations your troops will employ, a brief word here on those tactics for those unsure of the methods used on the battlefield, or just interested to know more.

Infantry

The battles of this period were still dominated by the movements of massed infantry formations. Three formations are of note; column, line and square.

Infantry most often formed into columns for speed and then into line in order to maximise firepower. The musket was ineffective at long range. However, massed volleypower, witheld until the target was within 50yds range could be devastating. To achieve maximum effectiveness, it was necessary for the infantry to be deployed into lines, usually of three ranks deep. The idea of the third rank was that the men could load for the other two but, without great discipline this only led to confusion.

English Rifleman

English Infantryman

Unlike the French, Prussians, Russians and Austrians, the British infantry did deploy into two ranks, having found they were able to reload as quickly in two ranks as in three.

The favourite tactical formation of the French was the mobile battalion column in divisions. Its rapid mobility was due to its narrow frontage, which made it far easier for the men to line up their ranks. Each column moved at 150yrd intervals to allow the column to deploy into line when necessary. A favourite tactic of Napoleon's was l'ordre mixte formation, in which one battalion deployed in line with two column battalions on each flank. The line battalion allowed for effective firepower, while the columns were capable of shock effect. Thrown in front of this formation there would be a screen of skirmishing light infantry. Bigger column formations would have whole regiments of light infantry fulfilling this role.

In the earlier years of the Napoleonic period, the use of these skirmishers worked to great effect as they harried and hindered the deployment of the less flexible, linear formations of the allied armies. But in the latter period, most of France's enemies had countered this tactic in kind, the British making especially good use of their own light infantry to counter skirmishing sharpshooters, after their experiences in the American War of Independance.

The flaws of Napoleonic tactics were not wholly uncovered until Napoleon met with Wellington, who had perfected the optimum counter to French shock tactics. In keeping the bulk of his infantry behind reverse slopes Wellington achieved a twofold benefit.

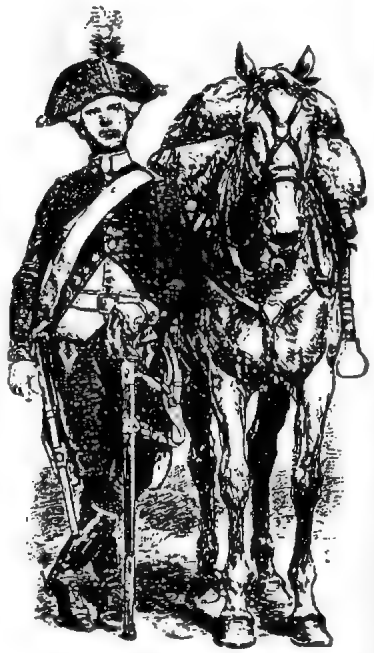
First, his men were shielded from artillery and skirmish fire, and second, the officers leading the attacking French columns were unable to pinpoint the exact location of their foe, with the result that they remained in column until they reached the very crest of the slope. There they were confronted by the still, silent ranks of British line, unable to deploy into line themselves, ready for the point of contact. The murderous vollies of close range musketry that they subsequently suffered were sufficient to bring the French to a reeling standstill. Into the confusion, the British were then ready to deliver a rousing charge that would send the shattered column in flight. It was just this that happened to the famous grenadiers of the Imperial Guard at Waterloo who, after following an incorrect line of approach, came upon Wellington's infantry before they expected to. The fire they received was so devasting that it prevented them from changing formation and they were thrown back in retreat.

When faced by the threat of a massed cavalry charge, the only real defence left to the infantry was to form a square formation, at least three ranks deep, and bristling with corners, the infantry square presented a barrier than no horse would attempt to charge down. The Artillery crews would often man their guns up to the last minute, before leaving their pieces and felling for the sanctuary of the square, around which the frustrated cavalry would swarm.

However, infantry that had formed square, made of themselves stationary targets that any well deployed artillery could decimate from close range.

Cavalry

On their own, cavalry were at a disadvantage when set against firm infantry that was sure to form square, given the time. Wheeling around bristling walls of bayonets, and subjected to close range fire, the unsupported cavalry were powerless, though squares that had suffered casualties or loss of morale had been known to break, it was not common, especially in the case of the British. For effective use it was important that the cavalry be used in concert with the rest of the army, with infantry and artillery support.



French Chasseur à Cheval

The main cavalry tactic was the shock action of the massed charge, which could be delivered in line or column, though column was preferable for cavalry charging infantry, and line, when attacking other cavalry. The beginning of a charge usually advanced at a trot for about a third of the distance to be covered to the target, moving up to a canter, then to a full gallop for the last thundering 50 yards.

A cavalry regiment in battle order usually deployed into a column of squadrons, with a 4 troop frontage in 2 ranks, each squadron following each other in waves. A regiment with its squadron deployed this way could then attack in line, in column providing a sufficient gap was maintained between squadrons, or in an echelon of squadrons. If charging in column the gap between squadrons was most important in ensuring that if the first squadron was repulsed, it did not reel back and disorder the one coming behind. In many cases, echelon was the best formation because it enabled successive waves of shock to hit the enemy line. The difficulty of the cavalry charge was maintaining control. If the horses are allowed to reach a gallop too soon, they would arrive at their objective blown, and if the excitement of the moment was allowed to get out of hand, the cavalry squadrons might charge beyond their target, leaving them struggling to rally when at their most vulnerable to a counterattack.

Light cavalry, apart from their campaign roles of reconnaissance and screening, also acted with rear and advance guards. Where contact was made with an enemy, they were expected to engage in pinning movements, inhibit enemy manoeuvre, and prevent him from occupying favourable ground. For real light cavalry effectiveness, they would have needed to be able to change formation quickly, and to be well skilled in those manoeuvres that allowed them to change front and fall upon an enemy's flank. At the end of a battle, their role would be to engage in the pursuit that exploits a victory, preventing the reforming of broken enemy units, or to cover the retreat of their own side.

The heavy cavalry, such as the cuirassiers, were best utilised for riding down enemy cavalry, or to exploit gaps created in enemy lines by artillery. Due to the very high cost of training and equipping heavy cavalry and, to a large extent, the other types, cavalry were not normally used wastefully, though in light of the unsupported charges of Kellerman and Milhaud's cavalry this was not the case at Waterloo.

*"**Cavalry is useful before, during and after a battle,**" Napoleon once wrote, "**General Lloyd asks what is the use of large amounts of cavalry. I say that it is impossible to fight anything but a defensive war, based on field fortification and natural obstacles, unless one has practically achieved parity with the enemy cavalry; for if you lose a battle, your army will be lost.**"*

Artillery

For Napoleon, artillery had a number of roles on the battlefield. First, the divisional and corps artillery had to support the infantry and bombard the enemy's weak points. Ideally, this would lower morale. Then the artillery reserve, led by the horse artillery, would be rushed to the front to commence a mass shelling of a selected weak point in the enemies line, prior to the main attack. All divisional and corps artillery would join in this, in an attempt to make a breach into which the main thrust could attack. Lastly, in pursuit, or retreat, the horse artillery would support the light cavalry, filling in gaps in the line where necessary.

Napoleon placed great reliance on massed batteries, sometimes containing as many as 100 guns. The guns were also quite boldly handled, with the corps and divisional artillery moving in advance of the infantry and unlimbering at close range with the enemy for maximum effect. However, the weather could defeat Napoleon's intentions, as it did at Waterloo where the previous night's rains prevented the use of ricochet fire due to the soft ground. Otherwise its effectiveness would have been far more noticeable.

Wellington, on the other hand, placed less reliance on mass batteries, not only because he rarely had sufficient numbers of them, but also because his line tactics required even distribution of artillery throughout the army.

French Imperial Guard Horse Artillery

The Hundred Days

The Devil Unchained

February 26th, 1815, and off the coast of the tiny Mediterranean island of Elba, a tiny invasion force sets sail. It's destination - France. With a strength of only 1,000 men, 4 cannon, and his closest companions, the 'Corsican Ogre', Napoleon Bonaparte, whose genius, and tyranny had held most of Europe in his warlike grip for more than a decade, left behind the isle of his enforced exile to challenge the allied forces of Europe once more.

Three days later, Napoleon stepped upon the shores of France once more, near Cannes, in the south. The previous year, on April 6th, 1814, with the Allies occupying Paris, and his most local Marshals deserting, or openly refusing to obey order, the Emperor Napoleon had been forced to abdicate, unconditionally, at the palace of Fontainebleau. But as he had left Fontainebleau, bound for HMS Inconstant, the British brig-of-war that would carry him off to Elba and exile, some had heard him mutter that he would be back in France in time to see the violets bloom. True to his promise he had indeed returned.

***'The devil is unchained'**, was the news from Sir Neil Campbell, Commissioner on Elba, and the first to learn of Napoleon's disappearance. Yet the response to the news that the scourge of Europe was, once more, on the move, was received with restrain and indecisiveness.*

The French people remained calm and uncommitted. The veteran Marshal Massena, based not far away, in Marseilles, made no move and Napoleon, taking advantage of the general hesitation, immediately began to travel north, for Paris, and the throne of France. During his exile, Napoleon had kept abreast of news in France and was aware of the discontent that grew there. The Bourbon regime of Louis XVIII, newly restored to the rule of France by the Allied powers of Europe, had rapidly lost the confidence of the people. Louis himself, although well intentioned, was an ailing, and unremarkable man who could never have matched the dynamics of his predecessor, Bonaparte.

Dissent had grown in many quarters. And one of the most important, as far as Napoleon's bid for recognition was concerned, was a peasantry that, naturally enough, was suspicious of the hordes of returning french nobility that now flocked to the reinstated Bourbon court. Despite reassurances to the contrary, they feared for the land they had acquired after the Revolution. And they were not the only faction with grievances. France's veteran soldiery had, in the main, been left without a place in the new French society after huge reductions in the size of her armies.

And finally, the Congress of Vienna, comprising the Allied powers of Britain, Austria, Bourbon France, Prussia and Russia, were in dispute as to how the frontiers of Europe should be restored. Into this confusion then, Napoleon had stepped, and the world breathlessly awaited.

The Road To Paris

It took four days for news of Napoleon's arrival to reach Louis XVIII in Paris, and a further five to reach Britain's representative at the Congress of Vienna, the Duke of Wellington, causing him to cancel a hunting trip.

French Voltigeur

In retrospect, international reaction to Napoleon's return was strangely restrained. It seemed that the general opinion was that this would be but a temporary intrusion into their newly gained stability. Once more, Napoleon's opponents underestimated him. His former favourite, Marshal Ney, set out for the south declaring that he would bring Napoleon back 'in an iron cage'.

All the while, Napoleon was moving inland towards Paris, to face the first real crisis of his attempt to regain the reins of power, near Grenoble, at the Laffrey Defile. Here he and his small army were confronted by the 5th Regiment of the Line, a dense line of muskets drawn up to bar his way.

With typical bravado, Napoleon stepped forward, pulling aside his famous 'redignote grise' the greycoat he always wore on campaign and, bearing his breast to his old soldiers said:

"Soldiers of the 5th, you can shoot your Emperor if you dare! Do you not recognise me as your Emperor? Am I not your old general?"

The line wavered.

"It is not ambition which bring me among you."** he lied, **"The forty-five best heads of the Government of Paris have called me from Elba and my return is supported by the three first powers of Europe."

*Napoleon's old magic was, it seems, impossible to resist. Ignoring their officers, the soldiers broke ranks shouting, **"Vive l'Empereur!"** as they ran to him.*

Napoleon entered Grenoble to rapturous acclaim. The following day the 7th of the line acted similarly, and the old tricolour sashes were brought out once more to replace the Bourbon insignia.

With this moment, Napoleon knew that he was, once more, a force to be reckoned with. And on he marched, addressing the populace at every opportunity and promising whatever would please them; security of land ownership, new reforms, a new age of peace. He seemed unstoppable. On the 17th of March he was joined by the 14th Regiment of the line, at Auxerre, and the following day, Marshal Ney, at the head of 6,000 men, was unable to resist the old charisma of this phenomenal leader of men.

In Paris, the Bourbon government watched its hold on the coutry slip away. Napoleon's march on Paris had become a triumphant procession with cheering crowds to line the way, and every French soldier defecting to his side. One Parisian wit even wrote an imaginary letter supposed to address Louis XVII, from Napoleon; **"My Good Brother,"** it read, **"there is no need to send any more troops; I already have enough."** With the Paris mob shouting revolutionary slogans in the streets, the Bourbons knew it was time to leave, silently, and in the secrecy of the night of March 19th, returning to exile in Belgium. On March 20th Napoleon reached Paris and seized power once more, only three weeks after arriving in France. His reign was only to last a hundred more days.

War and Peace

France was a nation already sick of the depredations of war. She had, after all, supported more than twenty years of conflict, spelling a disasterous legacy for her economy and had suffered a shocking drain on her manpower in accumulative casualties throughout Napoleon's earlier campaigns - successful and unsuccessful. Napoleon, therefore, had at least to go through the motions of pursuing peace even if it is assumed that he found the prospect unlikely and possibly undesirable. Also, he had to buy time, for the army left behind by the Bourbons numbered only 200,000. Potentially, the allies could muster many times that number. So Napoleon made a number of peaceful gestures, avoiding for the moment, re-introducing conscription, and attempted a dialogue with the allies in the hope that the rest of Europe would accept him as ruler of France.

It is hard to imagine that he was much surprised to find that the allies were unimpressed. Though he is known to have regretted returning so soon, when a few more months might well have allowed the disunity inherent in the Congress of Vienna to fragmant them more completely. With a Europe divided against itself, he might well have been able to fight the major nations singly, picking them off one by one, as he had attempted in the past. Instead, his sudden and dramatic return caused them to put their differences behind them, and to band together into the 'Seventh Coalition', whose express ambition it was, to rid Europe of Napoleon forever. In fact, a full week before he had even reached Paris, Napoleon had been denounced as an 'outlaw'.

Preparing For War

The allies of the Seventh Coalition determined to raise five armies with which to destroy the 'Corsican Ogre'; an Anglo-Dutch Army of 90,000 under the Duke of Wellington, victor of the Peninsular Campaign against the French in Spain, plus 117,000 Prussians under the veteran Prussian general, Blucher, both based in Belgium; an Austrian army of 210,000 under Schwarzenburg on the Upper Rhine; a Russian army of 150,000 under Barclay de Tolly on the Middle Rhine; and an Austro-Italian army of 75,000 under Frimont in Northern Italy. Their plan was simple enough - to destroy Napoleon by sheer force of numbers. Wellington, Blucher, and Schwarzenburg were to march on Paris, the Russian army acting as a reserve should any of the other three fall into difficulties; Frimont was to move on Lyons. Wellington was to command all forces in Belgium, and the French frontier was to be crossed by all by July 1st.

On May 3rd, Wellington met with Blucher at Tirlemont. Here, they agreed that, should Napoleon assume the offensive, something they both doubted, both their armies should concentrate along the line of the Crossroads of Quatre-Bras, and Sombreffe.

The following day, Blucher moved his HQ west from Liège to Namur. His 1st Corps, under Ziethen was moved to Fleurus; the IInd under Pirch, to Namur, the IIIrd under Thielemann, to Huy; and the IVth, under Bûlow to Liège. Wellington established his HQ in the Belgian capital, Brussels, along with his reserve. His Ist and IInd Corps, consisting of a mixture of British, Germans, Hanoverians, Dutch-Belgians, Brunswickers and Nassuaers were, but the beginning of June, strung out in scattered groups from Ghent, on the coast in the north, as far south as Mons, near the French border.

Napoleon now knew that he would have to fight to survive, and that with the appropriate propaganda, he could make the allies appear the aggressors, allowing him to re-introduce the hated conscription, and to fully mobilise.

He was faced by two strategic options: to wait while his armies could be rebuilt, or to initiate a swift, and hopefully unexpected attack before the whole of the Allies might could be brought to bear against him. A defeat of Wellington's Anglo-Dutch force, and Blucher's Prussians, the only armies actually operational, before the Austrians and Russians were able to come to the field could have many desirable repercussions.

Firstly, a swift victory would serve to anchor public opinion behind him, also, the pro-french Belgians were likely to revolt should the Anglo-Dutch army fall, creating a new resource of recruits for future campaigns. Additionally there was the chance the disgracing of Britain's foremost commander, the Duke of Wellington, might have led to the downfall of the Tory government of the time, to be replaced by the more pacifist Whigs. But in the face of Britain's long-term opposition to all of France's post revolutionary ambitions, and her position as Napoleon's most implacable foe, this is open to question.

If the defeat of Wellington and Blucher did not end the war, Napoleon next visualised, uniting with the Army of The Rhine, under Rapp, in Alsace, with which to fight the Austrians and Russians. Lastly, a war on foreign soil appeared infinitely more preferable to fighting upon French lands only recently ravaged by the campaign of 1814, which had precipitated Napoleon's exile.

Besides, any student of the principles of Napoleon's previous strategies can be in little doubt as to which choice Napoleon would make, especially in the light of the over-extended positions of the Allies, he knew they would not be ready to move against him before July.

And so, early in June, the first of Napoleon's army began to secretly move towards the Belgian frontier.

The Campaign of 1815

The Campaign of Napoleon's military prowess in his latter days of power has often been discussed. Indeed, his failure at Waterloo if frequently attributed to this. Yet there can be no doubting the subtlety and depth of his initial strategy at the start of the campaign.

The essential heart of his plan was to exploit the weakness of the Prussian and Anglo-Dutch lines of communication and supply. Although united by their desire to be rid of Napoleon, political differences between the two had led to both armies using separate lines of communication; the Anglo-Dutch running away from Brussels to Ostend and the English Channel, while the Prussian went away from Liège and into Central Germany.

Napoleon envisaged placing a wedge between the likeliest point of convergence between the two armies. If one or both could be compelled to retreat they would have to move along their own lines of communication, creating an ever-widening gap between the two. Using local superiority of numbers, Napoleon would then be able to defeat each army in turn, utilising the strategy known as that of the 'Central Position' which is, in brief, designed to defeat two opposing armies which would have superiority of numbers when joined. A part of the army, a corps, say, advances to make contact with one of the two opponents while the bulk of that force continues as fast as its speed of manoeuvre allows to defeat the other. If successful, the rest of the army is free to fall upon the remaining enemy. Obviously, there are numerous variations on this theme.

By the end of May Napoleon had, at his disposal, an active army of 284,000 men which included many disbanded veterans and returned prisoners of war, though in both armies, a proportion of these men were unconfirmed figures of the registers. From the active army, Napoleon formed L'Armée du Nord (The Army Of The North) consisting of approximately 120,000 men whose task it was to bring his surprise strategy about.

French Trooper - 7th Cavalry Regiment

The crux of Napoleon's gamble lay in the size of L'Armée du Nord, for it comprised approximately half of his effective manpower. The remainder, left to guard the French frontiers were thinly stretched to say the least. The success of Napoleon's plans, therefore, depended on those old military essentials, 'speed' and 'surprise'. Napoleon needed to seize the vital lateral route that formed the main communication between Wellington and Blucher's armies, so as to prevent them from concentrating against him. Extraordinary measures were taken to ensure the secrecy of his moves. From June 7th, all possible means were imposed to prevent communication and movement across the French frontier. The mail was suspended and civilian traffic carefully controlled.

On June 12th, the bulk of his force was concentrated on a front extending from Maugeuge, and running southeastwards to Rocroi, opposite the Franco-Belgian Border. Inside a week, the initial moves of L'Armée du Nord were completed, so that it was gathered around Beaumont on the night of the 14th with the Allies having scarcely any idea of what was about to occur, and remained in their various scattered billets.

On the night of the 13th of June, the Prussian patrols of Ziethen's Ist Corps, along the line of the River Sambre, had reported sighting the French campfires around Beaumont. Mindful of the support promised by Wellington in their agreement at Tirlemont the previous May, Blucher, on receipt of this information on the 14th, ordered his IInd, IIIrd, and IVth Corps to concentrate at Sombreffe, and cover the important lateral road, instructing Ziethen to cover this concentration and, if pushed back, to retire to Fleurus.

Wellington spent the 13th attending a cricket match, accompanied by a young lady, blissfully unaware of all that was taking place. In fact, it was not until the 15th, when the French had already begun their assault that Wellington knew what was happening. Even then, his responses were entirely the wrong ones due, in part, to a number of probing attacks, ordered by Napoleon, by French troops based around Dunkirk and Lille, which led Wellington to believe that Napoleon was attempting one of his most well-known strategies; that of a 'strategic envelopment' aimed at isolating Wellington's forces, and cutting them off from the Channel.

The net result was that Wellington initiated a set of orders that moved his forces westward, towards the outer flank, when the true crisis was occurring on the inner flank. Despite his agreement with Blucher requiring a movement by the Anglo-Dutch army towards the Prussians, Wellington was moving away. Yet it is hard to imagine how he could have thought that Napoleon would have wished to move Wellington and Blucher closer together. Still, if Wellington can be blamed for falling for the traps laid for him by Napoleon, Blucher can hardly be perceived to have been conducting his army in any less foolhardy a manner. For in the meantime, he was attempting one of the most dangerous of military manoeuvres, that of a forward concentration within striking distance of a strong opponent.

Since the early hours of the morning of the 15th, the French had been moving towards the Sambre River, one wing bound for Fleurus, the other to occupy the town of Charleroi on the Sambre itself. This general advance was not without its problems, for the army was attempting to advance on a narrow front.

The worst of these problems concerned the IIIrd Corps commanded by Vandamme who, deprived of their orders failed to move as required, with the result that to the rear, VIth Corps, under Lobau, was seriously hindered in its advance. To avoid this confusion Gérard, in command of IVth Corps, was diverted away east towards the bridges at Châtelet, only to discover that the general of his leading division, Bourmont, had deserted to the enemy. Predictably, morale was shaken and confusion ensued. Furthermore, General de Bourmont was able to reveal to the Prussians, Napoleon's orders and strength.

But to this intelligence Blucher remained impervious, leaving his HQ in Namur to arrive at Sombreffe at 4pm, intent on giving battle.

Due to the delay affecting Vandamme's IIIrd Corps, scheduled to be in the outskirts of Charleroi by 10am, but who only arrived there much later that afternoon, Napoleon was compelled to send a detachment of the Guard who, with customary ease, forced the Prussians out of Charleroi, and secured the vital bridges across the unfordable Sambre River.

Fortunately for the French, the Prussians had not thought of destroying the bridges. If they had, the very success of Napoleon's campaign might have been significantly hindered.

At noon, Napoleon entered Charleroi, to be joined later by Marshal Ney who was promptly given command of d'Erlon's Ist Corps, and Reille's IInd Corps, supported by the Guard Cavalry division of Lefebvre-Desnouette. **"Go and pursue the enemy,"** Napoleon told Ney, the 'bravest of the brave', and favoured Marshal of many campaigns. Napoleon must have issued more detailed orders than this, though controversy surrounds the exact nature of those orders and Ney's subsequent failure to carry them out to Napoleon's satisfaction. According to an Imperial Aide-de-Camp, Gourgaud, Ney was ordered to sweep the enemy off the Charleroi-Brussels Road and occupy Quatre-Bras. What Ney actually achieved we shall come to shortly.

The other wing of the army, consisting of the IIIrd and IVth Corps, plus the cavalry divisions of Pajol and Exelmann, was entrusted to Grouchy, a skilled cavalry general who had, nevertheless never commanded a whole army corps, let alone a wing, before. Grouchy was told to push the Prussians back to Sombreffe. Facing the bulk of Ziethen's retiring force, Grouchy made slow progress until Napoleon, who rode forward in person, urged Grouchy's wing on to greater efforts. The subsequent improvement brought the IIIrd Corps to the outskirts of Fleurus where they halted for the night.

Ney, in the meantime, led his wing up the Brussels road, west of Grouchy's advance, initially making much faster progress. Prussian forces were flushed out of Gosselies by late afternoon, but when French cavalry, probing further up the road, reached Frasnes, they came under fire by a detachment of Dutch-Belgians from Price Saxe-Weimar's Nassau Brigade. An infantry battalion was sent forward in support of the cavalry but, due to the failing light, Ney hesitated to advance further. With uncharacteristic caution, Ney was wary of Wellington's reputation for concealing troops, regarding the high standing corn nearby as the ideal site for such a tactic. Consequently, at 8pm, he halted his force for the night. An hour later, Napoleon was back in Charleroi, where he rested, having been in the saddle since 3am. At midnight he rose to tell his plans for the 16th to the recently arrived Ney. Despite Ney's failure to take Quatre-Bras, Napoleon had good reason to be pleased with all that he had accomplished. L'Armée du Nord was firmly in possession of the desired 'Central Position', and poised to exploit its successes on the morrow.

Wellington, on the other hand was totally unprepared for the situation that had developed. He had spent the evening of the 15th at the Duchess of Richmond's ball. Though his presence there was not as entirely frivolous as it might appear. Rumours abounded throughout Brussels, and it is likely that Wellington wished to give a show of outward calm.

Earlier that evening, having received a dispatch from Blucher indicating his intended concentration at Sombreffe, Wellington's response was to continue to concentrate his units away from the Prussians. He appeared to think the French attack would come much further west. He was, it seems, still preoccupied by the idea of a threat to his right flank. Around midnight, with the ball still in progress, Wellington received an urgent message. Aware of many eyes upon him, he did not react immediately but, a short while later, he rose and bid goodnight to those assembled, whispering as he did, to the Duke of Richmond, to enquire whether he had a good map in the house. Wellington was ushered into another room where he shut the door and said:

"Napoleon has humbugged me, by God! He has gained twenty-four hours march on me."

When asked what he intended to do he replied:

"I will order the army to concentrate at Quatre-Bras; but we shall not stop him there, and if so, I must fight him here."

As he spoke he indicated a point on the map, soon to be the site of one of history's most famous battles: Waterloo. By 7.30am Wellington had set out for Quatre-Bras, having ordered all units on a forced march for that place.

English Grenadier - 1st Regiment of Guards

At Charleroi, Napoleon considered his position, becoming more positive that Blucher must retire from his exposed position at Sombreffe and on that basis, deciding that it was with Wellington that he must first join battle, occupying Brussels before turning the entire Armée du Nord against the Prussians.

Concerned that Blucher might attempt to send support to Wellington by use of the lateral road, Napoleon decided to initiate some action against Blucher, with Grouchy's wing against Gembloux and Sombreffe. At 6am, Napoleon had finished dictating two letters. The one for Grouchy said that, should the Prussians be at Sombreffe or Gembloux, he would attack them and, having taken Gembloux, free his reserves to Ney to operate against Wellington. This he repeated in his letter to Ney, ordering him to make ready for a march on Brussels once the reserves had joined him. In the meantime, Ney was to advance a proportion of his forces north of Quatre-Bras, while still holding on to Quatre-Bras itself with 6 divisions, and a division at Marbais to link up with the left of Grouchy's wing.

Ney, despite his reputation for bravery and ability to lead men, was not considered the cleverest of men. For that reason, Napoleon saw fit to further elucidate:

"For this campaign I have adopted the following general principle. I shall divide the army into two wings and a reserve. Your wing will consist of Ist (d'Erlon) and IInd (Reille) Corps, two light cavalry divisions and two divisions of the Cavalry Corps. This should not be far short of 45-50,000 men and Marshal Grouchy, on the right wing shall have about the same. The Guard will form the reserve and I shall bring it to either wing as circumstances may dictate...Also, according to circumstances, I shall draw troops frm one wing to strengthen my reserve."

However, throughout all of the morning of the 16th, Ney did not act, despite having failed to take Quatre-Bras the previous day. Unknown to Ney the important crossroads of Quatre-Bras was only being held by the single brigade of Nassauers from General Perponcher's division led by Prince Saxe-Weimar who had been acting on his own initiative, and in direct disobedience of Wellington's orders when he held his ground and opposed the French Calvalry before withdrawing to Frasnes, south of Quatre-Bras. In fact, Ney's force of 50,000 men had come across just 4,000 infantry and 1 battery of guns.

Prince Saxe-Weimar had not been alone in his disobedience, for it was the Prince of Orange's chief-of-staff, General Constant de Rebecque at Ist Corps HQ who, after hearing of the engagement between Saxe-Weimar and the advanced guard of Ney's wing ordered General Bylandt's Brigade to the Nassauer's support. It was then that Wellington's initial misconceived order reached Ist Corps HQ, ordering Perponcher's entire division to Nivelles, more than 9 miles away. Fortunately for Wellington, Perponcher decided to ignore his order, on the grounds that he possessed knowledge his commanding officer did not. This act of insubordination probably saved the campaign for Wellington. And the act of occupying and reinforcing Quatre-Bras continued.

And still through the morning Ney made no move towards the crossroads of Quatre-Bras, obeying to the letter, an ambiguous phrase in Napoleon's 10am dispatch which seemed to imply that he await the Reserve's arrival. In the meantime, Napoleon had received a message from Grouchy reporting columns of Prussians sighted at Sombreffe. Napoleon, unable to believe that Blucher was pursuing a major battle in such an exposed position, refused to believe it. However, when he arrived at Fleurus at 11am and reconnoitred the enemy position, the disposition of Ziethen's Corps convinced his that this was no rearguard, but a force covering a general advance and the Sombreffe-Quatre-Bras road, the only road Wellington could use if he was to send aid. Napoleon could no longer ignore the evidence of the allies' forward concentration. Around 1pm Gérard's Corps began to arrive, and Napoleon decided to wait until it was present in full strength before he attacked.

Overjoyed, Napoleon watched Pirch and Thielemann arrive and begin to deploy and, since he now knew he had more than one corps to deal with, decided to make the Prussians his primary target, and to try conclusions with Blucher that afternoon.

Napoleon's plan was to engage in a frontal attack of the Prussian right and centre intended to force Blucher to commit his reserves. In the meantime, Napoleon planned to call down Ney from Quatre-Bras to appear on the rear of Blucher's right wing while the guard tore through the Prussian centre. Napoleon expected to destroy as much as two-thirds of the Prussian army and force the survivors back to Liège and away from Wellington.

At 2pm Ney was informed that Grouchy would attack at Sombreffe at 2.30pm and he was told:

"It is his majesty's intention that you also will attack whatever force is in front of you, and after having vigourously pushed it back, you will turn in our direction, so as to bring about the envelopment of that body of the enemy's troops whom I have just mentioned to you."

Napoleon then turned to Gérard, commander of IVth Corps and said:

"It is possible that three hours hence the fate of the war may be decided. If Ney carries out his orders thoroughly, not a gun of the Prussian army will get away.."

At 2.30pm, Vandamme, Girard and Gérard attacked, while Grouchy's cavalry held Thielemann. But the Prussians offered stiff resistance. Partly due to the lack of their orders to emphasise speed, both wings moved too slowly, with the result that the French found themselves faced with larger forces than they had expected. Napoleon, with Grouchy's wing found that he faced 84,000 Prussians and that they were determined to fight. Incredibly, it was overlooked that Lobau's Corps remained at Charleroi without orders, and so Napoleon demanded troops from Ney who now, due to the time he had wasted that morning, faced Wellington himself, who had arrived by 1pm and 20,000 men of his still gathering forces. When Napoleon heard of the numbers Ney faced at Quatre-Bras he realised that it was out of the question to expect Ney to bring all his forces east onto Blucher's Flank.

According to most acounts of the battle, Napoleon hastily scrawled another order in pencil, requiring Ney to send only D'Erlon's Ist Corps against the Prussian rear.

And all the while, the battle of Ligny continued. Blucher found himself so hard-pressed on his right, that he was forced to draw on his reserves repeatedly, until by 5pm they were nearly exhausted. Of the 68,000 troops that Napoleon had brought onto the field, he had used no more than 58,000 of them to hold Blucher's 84,000.

It was time, Napoleon judged, for the masse decision. Calculating that he could hear the cannon of d'Erlon's Ist Corps in the rear of the Prussian wing, he prepared to unleash the guard. But at 6pm, just as the order to advance was to be given, General Vandamme arrived to report that an unidentified column of troops, perhaps 20,000 strong, and presumably hostile, had appeared on the French left flank. A scout's unchecked report had unnerved Vandamme and his men were growing anxious.

At such a critical moment in the battle, Napoleon dared not take any risks and suspended the attack of the guard, sending a division of the Young Guard to bolster Vandamme's men, and an aide-de-camp to discover the identity of the column. In the easing of the pressure on the Prussian line that this pause brought about, Blucher struggled to reform his ragged line. The confusion in the French ranks allowed the Prussians to launch a vigorous assault upon Vandamme's Corps. Had it not been for the presence of the Young Guard it is possible that the whole corps might have fled.

By 6.30pm it was confirmed that the mysterious column of soldiers was, in fact, D'Erlon's Corps. Another aide-de-camp was then sent, to urge D'Erlon's Corps to its objective with all haste, arriving only to discover that just the leading division remained, the rest of the corps retiring under Ney's orders. Ordering another counter march would have been pointless. There wasn't time for the entire corps to reach their objective before dark.

The situation had begun to stabilise but time had been lost, for it was not until 7.30pm that Napoleon was ready to launch his assault. With darkness not far away, Napoleon knew that while he could be reasonably sure of victory, it was unlikely to be decisive.

As dark clouds began to fill the sky, the storm broke. With thunder that drowned the sound of the cannon, and rain that fell in driving sheets, the guard advanced at the charge, since the rain made firing impossible, and swept the Prussians out of Ligny.

The defeated Blucher suffered 16,000 casualties and lost 21 guns. He himself was unhorsed and ridden over, and was consequently missing from his HQ for some hours. The Prussian army lost a further 9,000 deserters from the ranks of it's militia, or Landwher. The strange marching and counter-marching of d'Erlon's corps that day which, as a result saw no action on either wing, came about first after Napoleon's demand for troops. One of Napoleon's Aides de Camp had caught up with d'Erlon's corps while it was still moving towards Ney at Quatre-Bras. Using the convention that allows an aide de camp to speak with the authority of his general, he had ordered d'Erlon to Ligny, both he and d'Erlon neglecting to inform Ney.

Scottish Private - 42nd Regiment

The hot tempered Ney, on finding that the rear corps on which he was depending for his breakthrough at Quatre-Bras was marching away, fell into a raging temper. He sent a peremptory order to d'Erlon demanding his return, while berating another of Napoleon's aides de camp who had just arrived, to such an extent, that he forgot to deliver a letter from Napoleon, telling Ney:

"Direct your march on the heights of Brye and St Armand [the Prussian right flank] so as to co-operate in a victory that may turn out to be decisive."

The consequence was that d'Erlon's only contribution was to panic Vandamme's corps on the left wing when his men, clad like Prussians in blue uniforms and bell-topped shakos, arrived unannounced in the French rear.

Ney, fighting with only Reille's IInd corps, was held to a draw at Quatre-Bras, a hardfought battle which, by 6.30 pm had seen the level of Wellington's reinforcements reach 36,000 men and 70 guns, a decided advantage over Ney and Reille. Casualties had been relatively heavy, but not as bad as those suffered at Ligny. The French lost 4,000, the Allies about 4,800, though Wellington had been given the time to achieve his belated concentration of men. In overall terms the advantage lay with the French. Blucher had been beaten, Wellington held, and Napoleon was in a position to reinforce Ney and destroy Wellington's army. Unknown to Napoleon important developments were taking place through the night of the 16th/17th, especially with the Prussians.

With Blucher still missing, it was left to General Gneisenau to determine the direction of the Prussian retreat, and a point where the broken Prussian units could rally and reform. Not kindly disposed to the British as a whole, and of the opinion that Wellington had, in some way, let his allies down, his idea was to retreat away towards Liège. Late in the evening, with still no sign of Blucher, a harrassed Gneisenau had to face up to the realities of the Prussian position. They had already been pushed beyond the Nivelles-Namur road, the shortest route to Liège, and it seemed advisable to fall back to Louvain to regroup in the north.

Experiencing difficulty in reading the place names on their maps by the light of their campfires, the town of Wavre was the only one marked sufficiently clearly for them all to see. While the officers were engaged in setting their men on the right roads, Blucher eventually appeared. Despite pressure to head back to Liège via Wavre, Blucher felt for prudent reasons, as well as a matter of honour, that the Prussians should prepare to support Wellington.

As a result of Gneisenau's fortunate choice for a rallying point, and Blucher's determined loyalty to his ally, the Prussians decided to support Wellington at Mont-St-Jean 12 miles east of Wavre. But for that, Wellington would have certainly been defeated on the 18th. But on the 17th, the following day, Napoleon was so convinced that he had driven the allies apart, and that he had only Wellington to deal with, that he relapsed into a kind of lethargy for the day.

Napoleon was convinced that the Prussians were retiring in disorder towards Liège, and though he had heard nothing from Ney overnight, he had assumed that Ney was in control of Quatre-Bras, with Wellington falling back to protect Brussels. No cavalry patrols were sent out at daybreak to confirm the Prussian line of retreat and he did not even think to send an aide overnight to Quare-Bras to see how Ney had fared. When a cavalry patrol was sent out, the intelligence Napoleon received was of a horde of Prussians heading for Liège, which served to confirm Napoleon's conviction of a Prussian retreat in that direction, but these were only deserting Prussian militia men making good their escape.

When word arrived that Wellington was still in place at Quatre-Bras, Napoleon believed it unlikely that he would renew his stand now that the Prussians had been pushed back. The French reserve was within easy marching distance of Quatre-Bras if Wellington should make the attempt and so, instead of ordering Ney to reopen the engagement immediately, to pin Wellington until the reserve could move up on his flank, Napoleon issued belated orders instructing Ney to occupy Quatre-Bras only if held by a rearguard.

Napoleon's slowness on the morning of the 17th lost him the chance of attacking Wellington while he was isolated. He did not awaken to reality until 11.00 am when Ney's full report of the previous day's action coincided with the return of cavalry probes sent towards Quatre-Bras. The information confirmed that Wellington was holding his ground. Only then, did Napoleon realise the opportunity that presented itself.

Galvanized into activity, Napoleon immediately ordered Grouchy to take both his corps and move to Gembloux, there to keep tabs on the Prussians. Lobau's Reserve and Drouot's Guard were sent to threaten Wellington's flank and Ney was ordered to attack at once.

Unlike Napoleon, Wellington had sent out patrols in the early hours of the morning to discover the outcome of Ligny. On receipt of the news of the heavy Prussian defeat and retreat to Wavre, Wellington remarked:

"As he has gone back, we must go back too. I suppose in England they will say we have been licked. I can't help it; as they have gone back, we must go too."

Orders for the evacuation of the wounded and the preparation of a general withdrawal were at once issued. When confirmation was received of Blucher's intention to give Wellington his support, the Duke's mind was made up. A message was sent to Blucher to say that Wellington would stand and fight at Mont-St-Jean if Blucher could provide the assistance of two corps.

This was the significance of the retreat to Wavre. Instead of retreating away from Wellington, the Prussians had begun regrouping within range of Mont-St-Jean, with the River Dyle to protect their left, and reasonable roads for their march. Napoleon's lethargy on the morning of the 17th had served to increase the chance of an Anglo-Prussian concentration rather than prevent it.

By midday, the British began to thin out and march back to Mont-St-Jean. Covered by a thunderstorm which made pursuit across country impossible, the last of Wellington's rearguard evaded Napoleon's pursuing cavalry, that had recently arrived, but arrived too late.

Wellington's army, numbering barely 68,000 with 154 guns had by 6.30 pm reached the safety of the ridge at Mont-St-Jean. During the night the Armeé du Nord arrived on the ridge south of them, 72,000 strong, with 246 guns and 33,000 more engaged in the pursuit of the Prussians.

The Battle of Waterloo - 1815

Both armies spent a miserable night of heavy rain on the 17th June, 1815. At his recently established headquarters at the farmstead of Le Caillou, Napoleon read a dispatch from Marshal Grouchy, indicating that part of the defeated Prussian army seemed not to be retiring to Liège, as Napoleon had thought, but to Wavre. Grouchy indicated that if it were so, he would manoeuvre to prevent the Prussians from moving towards either Brussels or Wellington. Possibly still considering the Prussians a spent force, Napoleon did not reply at once. Yet the Prussians were, even then, marching on Wavre, strengthened by their meeting of a fresh corps commanded by Bulow that had been unable to reach Ligny in time for the battle there on the 16th.

The morning dawned clear and cloudless and by 9.00 am Napoleon met with his generals to discuss the coming battle. Napoleon was feeling confident, in contrast to some of the opinions expressed by his subordinates who had suffered at the hands of Wellington in the Spanish Peninsula Wars. Marshal Soult, Napoleon's chief-of-staff, and a veteran of the Spanish wars advised that Grouchy's force of 30,000 men be recalled. Angrily, Napoleon turned to him, saying:

"Because you have been beaten by Wellington you consider him a good general, but I tell you that Wellington is a bad general and the English are bad troops. The whole affair will not be more serious than swallowing one's breakfast."

It was perhaps this underestimation of Wellington that led to some of the grave errors committed by the French that day. It perhaps would also account for Napoleon's delay in beginning the battle, although he also gave due consideration to the state of the ground which was still too wet to allow the artillery to employ ricochet fire, or for his artillery and cavalry to be fully mobile.

At 10.00 am Napoleon moved his HQ to Ronsomme Farm where he dictated his orders to Grouchy, making his first mistake of the day. For these orders were neither a definite instruction of recall, or of independent action. Grouchy was ordered to Wavre:

"…. in order to draw near us, and to place yourself in touch with our operations, and to keep up your communications with us, pushing before you those portions of the Prussian army which have taken this direction and have halted at Wavre…."

The failure to recall Grouchy, and the delay of the opening of the battle were some of Napoleon's most fatal decisions, for to have begun his attack that morning would surely have led to Wellington's defeat, since Blucher would have arrived too late to affect the outcome.

A distinguishing feature of the battlefield of Waterloo was it's small area. The shallow valley between the two ridges occupied by the opposing armies ran for some 1,500 yards. The battle area was only 5,000 yds wide from the Château of Hougoumont in the west, to the town of Papelotte in the east.

Crossing the ground between both armies the Brussels-Charleroi highway ran from the centre of the French position, at the hamlet of La Belle Alliance, to Wellington's forward position at La Haie Sainte, and over a crest down the reverse slope toward Mont-St-Jean.

The French deployed almost every man they had in full view of Wellington's army, intending to gain as much of a psychological advantage as possible. West of the Brussels road stood Reille's IInd Corps and to the east, d'Erlon's Ist Corps. Behind these were placed much of the French cavalry; Kellerman and a division of Guard cavalry in position behind Reille, Milhaud's cuirassiers and Lefebvre-Desnouette's Guard light cavalry behind d'Erlon. To the centre and rear of these formations was Lobau's VIth Corps of 10,000 men, two more cavalry divisions and behind them the Imperial Guard.

Across the valley, Wellington's men awaited the French attack. The Duke's position had been carefully chosen, with the advantages of the terrain in mind. The bulk of the army was deployed north of the Chemin d'Ohain, a narrow road following the line of the Mont-St-Jean crest. East of the Brussels highway was quite lightly held, in anticipation of the promised arrival of the Prussians.

As was his custom, Wellington had placed the majority of his army behind the reverse slopes of Mont-St-Jean, for protection. Much of Lord Hill's IInd Corps was drawn up between the village of Merbraine and the Nivelles road, with General Chassé's Division from the Ist Corps (placed under Hill's command for the day) holding Braine l'Alleud to the west.

To their forward left were four Brigades, drawn from Clinton and Colville's Divisions in a second line position. The Prince of Orange's Ist Corps formed the centre along with part of the Reserve Corps. East of the Brussels Highway stood the Reserve Division of General Picton and two brigades of VIth division.

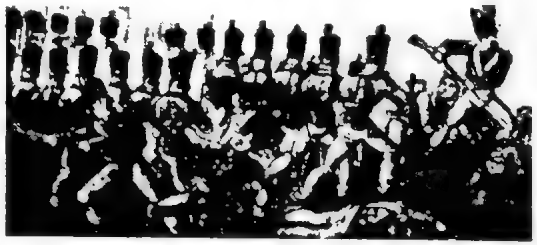
Ahead of Wellington's main line, he had strengthened three strongpoints; the Château of Hougoumont, garrisoned by troops from the Guards Division, plus some Nassauers, some Luneburgers and Hanoverians; La Haie Sainte by a detachment of the King's German Legion, with part of the 95th Regiment manning a sandpit, a little to the north and west of the Brussels highway; and the area of Papelotte, La Haie, and Frischermont was manned by part of Perponcher's division, the Nassau Brigade commanded by Prince Saxe-Weimar. The purpose of these defensive outposts was to break up any French advance.

As with Napoleon and Grouchy, Wellington had a large force that did not enter the day's battle; 17,000 men and 30 guns under Prince Frederick, stationed 10 miles west of the battlefield. These were placed as a precaution against any attempt by Napoleon to strike westward, though when battle was joined, it was an oversight on Wellington's part not to recall them.

Thus both armies deployed. And at 11.00 am after a tour of the French army, Napoleon issued his general order of attack. Surprisingly, given Napoleon's proven skills as a tactician, it was a relatively unsophisticated plan, of the frontal attack variety.

A number of initial diversionary attacks were planned, to be followed by a single massive offensive. No provision was made for the appearance of the Prussians and the actual handling of Napoleon's plans was entrusted to Marshal Ney, whose performance in the previous days of the campaign had shown him to be unreliable in command.

Nevertheless, at 11.30 am the first cannon bombardment thundered in support of Prince Jerome's division of Reille's IInd Corps, the first of Napoleon's intended feints. The attack was directed at Hougoumont. Infantry in the woods and orchard around the buildings were driven back, but the attack faltered at the stone perimeter walls, manned by just 4 companies of the Guards Brigade. Despite the fact that this was meant only as a diversionary attack, Prince Jerome, Napoleon's brother, determined to take his objective, regardless of cost. Jerome was perhaps, unsuccessfully trying to emulate the military reputation of his brother for, against the advice of his staff, he then launched a series of desperate assaults against the strong allied position. Enraged at the stiff resistance of the defenders, Jerome proceeded to call up more reinforcements. Eventually, much of Reille's Corps were to be tied up there.



This serious tactical error threatened French success from the outset, for although Wellington released successive units of the Coldstream Guards to reinforce Hougoumont, he resisted the temptation to commit his reserve to the support of the Château and thus, his general disposition was not affected, whilst most of Reille's Corps were tied down for the rest of the battle.

Meanwhile, Napoleon was massing an 80 gun battery to the front of his front centre, ready to blast a hole in the Allied centre before d'Erlon's Corps began the frontal assault. The battery opened fire at 1.00 pm, though without causing sufficient damage, since the soft earth prevented ricochet fire, and much of Wellington's force was protected by the reverse slopes of the Mont-St-Jean ridge.

While d'Erlon's Corps formed, Napoleon sighted movement north-east of the battlefield. There were suggestions that it might be Grouchy, but these hopes were soon dashed by the information of a cavalry patrol. It was soon realised that the Prussians were indeed headed for the battle. Not once, did Napoleon consider retiring from the battle. Instead, Lobau's Corps and the cavalry of Domont and Subservie were ordered to guard the French right flank.

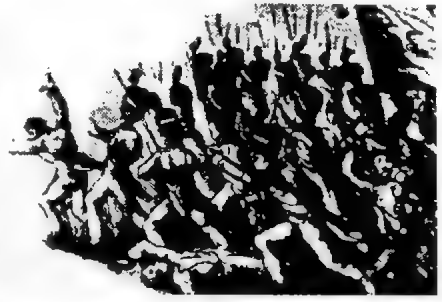
At 1.30 pm the French drums beat the 'pas de charge', and d'Erlon's entire corps of four divisions advanced up the ridge towards Wellington's left centre. Despite the usual French tactic of preceding an infantry attack with a cavalry attack, aimed at forcing the enemy infantry into squares that lessened it's frontal firepower, almost no cavalry support was ordered.

In the face of devastating artillery fire the French moved doggedly on, Durutte capturing Papelotte and Frischermont on the right of the advance and to the left Quiot's division surrounding a detachment of troops of the King's German Legion at La Haie Saint. This was the only sector of the French assault to have cavalry support, and when Wellington moved a battalion of Luneberg militia men in support of La Haie Saint, they were caught by a regiment of French cuirassiers, and smashed.

In the centre, Donzelot and Marcognet's Divisions crested the ridge, routing a unit of Belgians, and forcing the British to evacuate the sandpit. If adequate cavalry support had been allocated to the attack, Wellington might have been smashed with this first onslaught, as Napoleon had intended. Even without this support, the situation was critical.

Then, brigades from Picton's Division advanced to meet the threat. Only 3,000 strong, faced by two divisions of d'Erlon's Corps - some 10,000 men, it was a desperate moment, and though Picton was killed, the defence held.

All the while, Wellington watched as the French became more disordered as they pressed their attack. At precisely the right moment, he launched a charge of heavy cavalry, wreaking havoc amongst the French.



First came the Household Cavalry, led by Lord Uxbridge, crashing into the cuirassiers, still reforming after their charge against the Lunebergers and on into the infantry, sending the cuirassiers and part of Quiot's infantry into flight. Riding hard behind came Ponsonby's Union Brigade, so-called because it comprised the Scots Greys, the Innerskillings and the Royal Dragoons. The first ranks of the cavalry forced their way into the midst of Donzelot and Marcognet's stunned men, sending them reeling, some fleeing, others doggedly fighting on as they retreated. All this was too much for the Scots Greys, meant to wait in a supporting role, and they rode forward passing the 92nd Highlanders of Picton's Division. They greeted them with a cry of ***"Hurrah, 92nd! Scotland forever!"****, and some grabbed hold of the stirrups to be borne into the fray.*

Gathering speed, the horsemen rode headlong at the French shattering the divisions of Marcognet and Donzelot. Napoleon's first attack had foundered. The Greys, carried away by their success, were deaf to calls for them to rally, carrying on across the valley to charge the French gun batteries, silencing 30 guns, and on into the heart of Napoleon's position. Out of formation, their horses blown, the Greys failed to rally in time, and were attacked by French cuirassiers, who cut them to pieces.

Wellington had, however, survived the first great crisis of the day.

By mid-afternoon, apart from the bitter fighting around Hougoumont, the action slackened. Then the French re-opened their bombardment, causing Wellington to order his troops back behind the protection of the reverse slopes in response to mounting casualties. Ney, mistaking this movement for a withdrawal, rashly decided on a bold move, ordering a brigade of Milhaud's cuirassiers to charge. But, what began as a small cavalry charge escalated into a major engagement as more and more cavalry, many without orders, were drawn into the attack. Lefebvre-Desnouettes followed Milhaud's corps, and soon, 5,000 cavalry went sweeping up the ridge. Wellington looked on, astonished. Not only did this move obscure part of the great French battery's line of fire, but also, Ney, in his haste, had neglected to order up infantry and horse artillery support.

Wellington formed his infantry into 20 battalion squares in echelon. As the resplendent cuirassiers mounted the crest, they were greeted by the grim spectacle of the allied infantry squares, tightly packed with bristling bayonets. In the path of the approaching cavalry, the allied artillery fired a constant, and deadly cannonade upon their unforgettable target, waiting until the last moment before the gunners retreated to the safety of the squares. The cavalry hurled themselves at the squares, to be repulsed by volleys of muskets at short range. Again and again, the cavalry came at them, each time to be repulsed and fired upon by the artillery as they retired and formed for another charge.

As British losses mounted, Wellington could be seen, moving from square to square, encouraging the men, and urging them to stand firm. Conditions within the squares became unbearable, with piles of dead and dying, and suffocating smoke. But the French could not break them.

Napoleon, from his new command post near La Belle Alliance regarded these events with concern, saying: ***"This is a premature movement that may lead to fatal results."***

In order to extricate the forty squadrons already in action, Napoleon saw no option but to commit the remaining French cavalry, in an attempt to break Wellington before Blucher arrived in force. By 5.00 pm 10,000 cavalry charged over the ridge, only to be turned by intense defensive fire.

Realising at last, that he needed infantry support Ney, who by now had lost four horses, killed under him, galloped back to Hougoumont where 8,000 men, the one and a half divisions not tied down by the fighting round the Château were led into the fray. By now, the cavalry was a spent force, and the infantry, greeted by a mass of Allied infantry and artillery fire, lost 1,500 men in ten minutes understandably, retiring.

Napoleon moved up and down the line of his tiring men, regarding Wellington's positions. Once more he saw how vital the position of La Haie Saint was, and ordered Ney to take it. Just after 6.00 pm, Ney advanced with reformed units from Donzelot's Division, some cavalry and a handful of guns.

Finally using the correct tactical method, he was successful and the farmhouse, it's adjoining buildings, and the sandpit, fell into his hands. From here, Ney was able to site a battery only 300 yds from the Allied centre, and unleashed a devastating barrage. A dangerous gap appeared in Wellington's line, and Ney appealed to Napoleon to send up more infantry to exploit his considerable gains.

Wellington faced the second and greatest crisis of the day, for his centre was wavering.

But Napoleon's attention was focused on Lobau's desperate holding action against the Prussians, who were entering the field in ever growing numbers and were now threatening to encircle him.

Already, Napoleon had committed the Young Guard to aid the outnumbered Lobau, who had pushed the Prussians out of Plancenoit, only to be routed in turn. Napoleon had to think carefully. His final reserve - eight untouched battalions of the Old Guard, and six of the Middle Guard were all the infantry he had left. Both Lobau and Ney were calling for aid, Ney claiming that he needed only six or seven of these battalions to clinch victory. But the previous errors of the day had done little to convince Napoleon of Ney's judgement and accordingly, eleven Guard battalions were sent east to form a line of defensive squares facing Plancenoit and shielding the whole right flank. Two more were then sent to retake Plancenoit, leaving only one to guard the HQ. Ney watched as his chance of victory began to ebb away, while the two battalions of the Old Guard seized Plancenoit, forcing 14 battalions of Prussians to retreat.

The Young Guard re-occupied Plancenoit and, though the two Old Guard battalions were eventually forced back, the French right flank stabilised and several Guard battalions were recalled to the reverse.

For Wellington, the situation in his fragmenting centre was growing worse. But the chance of victory was quickly passing when Napoleon returned his attention to the centre. With 9 battalions of the Imperial Guard returned to him, Napoleon decided to make one last desperate attempt to break Wellington. At 7.00 pm, the Guard advanced. But by now, Wellington had received support from Ziethen's Prussian corps on his left, allowing him to draw other units into his weakened centre.

Wellington knew the coming assault must fall between Hougoumont and La Haie Saint and he carefully adjusted his positions. His battle line, four ranks deep, took what cover it could from the French artillery and waited.

One of militatry history's most celebrated events was about to take place. At 7.30 pm the Guard approached. One battalion had been left as Napoleon's bodyguard, two battalions faced west to create a defensive flank while the remainder marched impressively into the gathering dusk. As each part of the attack crested the slope in turn it encountered a fierce reception. Near La Haie Saint the Ist/IIIrd Grenadiers defeated a contingent of Brunswick troops only to be halted and decimated by Allied artillery and General Chasse's musket fire, further west the French IVth Grenadiers and Ist/IIIrd Chasseurs succeeded in winning the crest of the ridge, where Maitland's Guards Brigade waited, lying behind a low bank.

*When the tall, red plumed bearskin helmets of the Guard appeared over the top of the hill, Wellington called out, "**Now Maitland! Now is your time!**" With that, the British Guards rose and loosed a hail of fire into the astonished faces of the French elite. Forced to fall back, the stunned Imperial Guard were chased from the ridge by a well timed bayonet charge.*

At the foot of the hill, the French Guard reformed and advanced up the hill again. Once more the British troops were ready. As the French crested the slope, they found Adam's Light Brigade drawn up behind a screen of high standing corn.

As the firing began, the 52nd Regiment turned and occupied a parallel line to the French approach, sending a company forward to snipe at the column's flank. The French halted to retaliate and lost their momentum. Disordered by another volley of fire and another bayonet charge and the Guard fled for the first time in it's history.

Retreating in disorder, and harried by cavalry, panic seized the remainder of Napoleon's forces. Wellington ordered a general advance, and the cheering Allied forces fell upon the dazed ranks as more and more Prussians poured onto the field of the Armeé du Nord. The cohesion of the French army snapped and unit after unit dissolved into a swarm of fugitives. The victory has been won.

Napoleon did all he could to check the panic, but the situation was out of hand. Forming 3 squares from the shattered and retreating column of the Old Guard he attempted to cover the flight of his army. But the fleeing troops pressed against the squares, forcing them to withdraw once more. The Old Guard continued to cover the flight of the French army, and of Napoleon himself and, when called to surrender, refused several times, and eventually, were shot down.

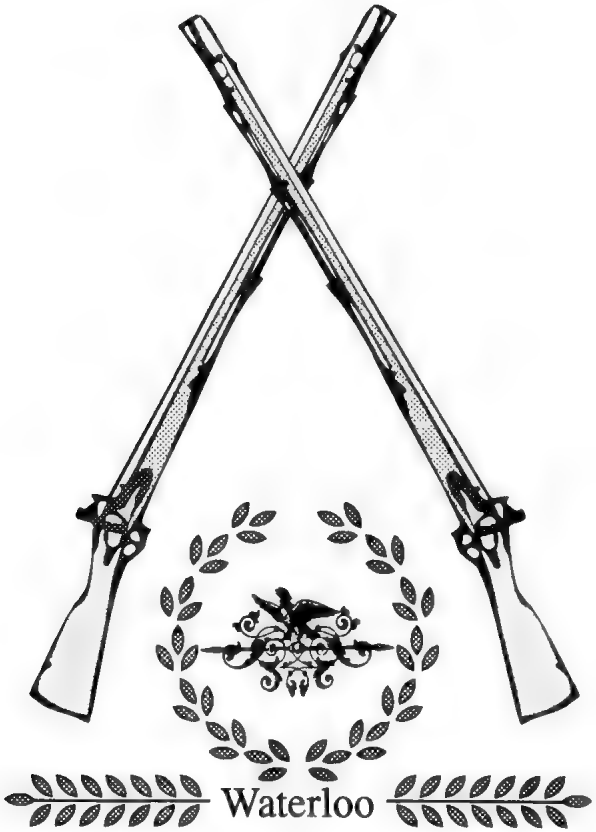
"A damned near-run thing" *Wellington called it. He and Blucher, whose belated arrival had been the guarantee of success, met at 9.00 pm at the aptly named La Belle Alliance.*

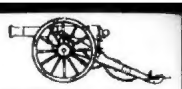
French casualties were estimated at 25,000 killed and seriously wounded. The Allies lost 15,000 on Mont-St-Jean and more than 7,000 of the 45,000 Prussians that were eventually involved in the battle were also lost.

Napoleon reached Paris on the 21st of June and the following day, abdicated. Hoping to escape to the United States of America for sanctuary, Napoleon set out for Rochefort where he believed a French frigate waited at his disposal. On arrival, he found a British Navy squadron off the port. In the days that followed, many plans and schemes were discussed but, after being warned that the returned Louis XVIII had ordered his arrest, Napoleon agreed to board HMS Bellerepheron and threw himself on the charity of the British Prince Regent, still hoping to the last that his adversaries would allow him to sail to America or settle in England.

The Prince Regent and the Government of Lord Liverpool felt otherwise, however, and before long Napoleon was bound for the remote island of St. Helena in the South Atlantic, where he remained until his death in 1821.

Army Lists





Unit Strengths

Unit strengths are as follows:

1	*Infantry Regiment*	*1000 men*
1	*Cavalry Brigade*	*600 horsemen*
1	*Artillery Battery*	*400 crew*
		16 guns

Prussian Brigades are approximately the size of British or French Divisions. The terms Regiment and Brigade can be applied to Infantry or Cavalry.

The Prussian Landwehr are the equivalent to Militia.

NOTE:

If you are familiar with the events of Waterloo you may notice the absence of Marshal Ney on the French Army List. Those wishing to play the French are possibly quite relieved! Since Napoleon gave Ney the role of battlefield commander, charged with acting out Napoleon's plans, he might possibly be leading any French units into battle. He has not been listed as any particular Corps commander, to reflect his semi-independent status as Napoleon's 'right hand', as it were.

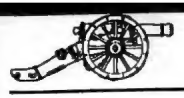
FRENCH ARMY - COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF: NAPOLEON

General	Division	Composition
Ist Corps - d'Erlon		
Quiot	Ist Infantry	4 Line Regiments
Donzelot	IInd Infantry	3 Line 2 Light Regiments
Marcognet	IIIrd Infantry	4 Line Regiments
Durutte	IVth Infantry	4 Line Regiments
Jacquinot	Ist Cavalry	2 Light Brigades
Desales	Corps Artillery	2 Foot 1 Horse Batteries
IInd Corps - Reille		
Bachelu	Vth Infantry	4 Line Regiments
Jerome	VIth Infantry	3 Line 4 Light Regiments
Foy	IXth Infantry	3 Line 2 Light Regiments
Pire	IInd Cavalry	3 Light Brigades
Pelletier	Corps Artillery	2 Foot Batteries
VIth Corps - Lobau		
Simmer	XIXth Infantry	4 Line Regiments
Jeanin	XXth Infantry	3 Line 1 Light Regiments
Domon	IIIrd Cavalry	2 Light Brigades
Subervie	Vth Cavalry	2 Light Brigades
Noury	Corps Artillery	2 Foot 1 Horse Batteries

General	Division	Composition
IIIrd Reserve Cavalry Corps - Kellerman		
Lheretier	XIth Cavalry	3 Heavy Brigades
d'Hurbal	XIIth Cavalry	3 Heavy Brigades
Tancarville	Corps Artillery	1 Horse Battery
IVth Reserve Cavalry Corps - Milhaud		
Alphonse	XIIIth Cavalry	3 Heavy Brigades
Delort	XIVth Cavalry	2 Heavy Brigades
Chasseriau	Corps Artillery	1 Horse Battery
Imperial Guard - Drouot		
Duhesme	Young Guard	4 Guard Regiments
Friant	Grenadier	4 Guard Regiments
Morand	Chasseur	4 Guard Regiments
Lefebvre	Light Cavalry	3 Guard Regiments
Guyot	Heavy Cavalry	3 Guard Regiments
Saint-Maurice	Guard Artillery	4 Foot 2 Horse Batteries

ALLIED ARMY - COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF: WELLINGTON

General	Division	Composition
Ist Corps - Orange		
Cooke	Ist Infantry	3 Guard Regiments
Alten	IIIrd Infantry	6 Line 1 Light Regiments
Perponcher	IInd Dutch-Belgian	4 Line 1 Light 2 Militia
Chasse	IIIrd Dutch-Belgian	2 Line 1 Light 3 Militia
Macdonnel	Hougoumont Detachment	2 Guard 2 Line Regiments
Gunkel	Corps Artillery	3 Foot Batteries
IInd Corps - Hill		
Clinton	IInd Infantry	3 Line 2 Light 2 Militia
Churchill	IVth Infantry	1 Line 1 Light
Egerton	Corps Artillery	1 Foot Battery
Army Reserve Corps - Lancey		
Picton	Vth Infantry	4 Line 2 Militia
Lambert	VIth Infantry	2 Line 3 Militia
Kruse	Nassai Contingent	2 Line 1 Militia
Olfermans	Brunswick Contingent	2 Line 2 Light 1 Guard
Cramm	Brunswick Cavalry	1 Light Brigade
Wood	Reserve Artillery	2 Foot 1 Horse Battery



General	Division	Composition
Cavalry Corps - Uxbridge		
Somerset	Ist Cavalry Brigade	2 Guard Regiments
Ponsonby	IInd Cavalry Brigade	2 Heavy Regiments
Dornberg	IIIrd Cavalry Brigade	2 Light Regiments
Vandaleur	IVth Cavalry Brigade	2 Light Regiments
Grant	Vth Cavalry Brigade	2 Light Regiments
Vivian	VIth Cavalry Brigade	3 Light Regiments
Arenschildt	VIIth Cavalry Brigade	2 Light Regiments
Estorff	Hanoverian Brigade	1 Light Regiment
Collaert	Dutch-Belgian Cavalry	4 Light 2 Heavy Regiments

PRUSSIAN ARMY - COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF: BLUCHER

General	Brigade	Composition
Ist Corps - Ziethen		
Steinmetz	Ist Infantry	2 Line 1 Light Regiments
Treskow	Ist Cavalry	3 Light Regiments
Holtzendorff	Corps Artillery	1 Foot 1 Horse Battery
IInd Corps - Pirch		
Tippelskirsch	Vth Infantry	2 Landwehr 3 Light
Brause	VIIth Infantry	2 Landwehr Regiments
Bose	VIIIth Infantry	2 Landwehr 4 Light
Sohr	IInd Cavalry	2 Light Regiments
Rohl	Corps Artillery	1 Foot Battery
IV Corps - Bulow		
Hake	XIIIth Infantry	4 Landwehr 2 Light
Funck	XIVth Infantry	5 Landwehr 2 Light
Losthin	XVth Infantry	4 Landwehr 2 Light
Hiller	XVIth Infantry	4 Landwehr 2 Light
Schwerin	Ist Cavalry	3 Light Regiments
Waltzdorf	IInd Cavalry	1 Light Regiment
Sydow	IIIrd Cavalry	3 Landwehr Cavalry